

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L ISTANBUL 001617

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/30/2013

TAGS: PHUM TU CU

SUBJECT: ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH CONTEMPLATES CUBA VISIT

REF: A. DEUTSCH/SILVERMAN/SMITH E-MAILS

¶B. 10/30-31/2003

Classified By: A/CG Stuart Smith for reason 1.4 (d).

¶11. (C) Summary: Ecumenical Patriarchate leadership confirms that Patriarch Bartholomew is considering a trip to Cuba on January 21, 2004 to dedicate a new Orthodox Church. Now aware of USG concerns about the trip, the Patriarch may reconsider. Action request in para 5. End Summary.

¶12. (C) Poloff spoke with Metropolitan Meliton of Philadelphia on October 31, and raised the issue of a possible trip to Havana by Patriarch Bartholomew. Meliton confirmed that the Patriarch has tentatively accepted such an invitation. He asked for US views on the issue, explaining that the Patriarch would not want the trip to cause problems with the USG.

¶13. (C) Poloff noted that we understand the Patriarch's good intentions in supporting the Orthodox Church in Cuba, and his desire to promote religious liberty. However, a visit by the Patriarch might be used by Castro to "paper over" recent human rights abuses by the regime, or to undermine dissent by local Christians. Thus, Poloff noted, a trip to Cuba by the Patriarch could cause a wrinkle in the long-standing USG-Patriarchate relationship.

¶14. (C) Poloff said that the USG was eager to discuss this issue with the Patriarchate, and would welcome further, more authoritative discussion of the issue either through the Consulate General in Istanbul or the Embassy in Ankara. Meliton took careful note of all this and said that he would be writing a memo to the Patriarch immediately, and would have a response from the Patriarch no later than November 4. He said, however, the Patriarch would not want to do anything to harm our relationship. Though Bartholomew had agreed verbally to the trip, no written confirmation has yet been sent.

¶15. (C) Post will follow up with the Patriarchate November 4, and requests further talking points for subsequent discussions.

SMITH